DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 444 059 CG 030 154

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TITLE The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.
PUB DATE 2000-03-00
NOTE 12p.; In: Making Waves: Career Development and Public Policy. International Symposium 1999 Papers, Proceedings, and Strategies (Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, May 2-4, 1999); see CG 030 145.
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120) -- Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Vocational Education; *Career Development; Cooperation; Foreign Countries; *Government Role; Labor Force Development; National Programs; *Public Policy; Secondary Education; Secondary School Students; *Social Change; Technology
IDENTIFIERS China; *Hong Kong

ABSTRACT

In Hong Kong, career guidance and employment services for secondary school students and the public at large are provided by the Education Department, the Labour Department, and the Hong Kong Association of Careers Masters and Guidance Masters. These organizations work together to provide career information, guidance, and employment assistance. The Hong Kong University Careers Education and Placement Centre provides services in career education and placement in tertiary institutions, and provides a wide range of services to employers as well. In the face of rapid change in Hong Kong, there are several issues that will influence future strategies and policies in career development. These include: the movement of manufacturing to China, causing Hong Kong's economy to shift from manufacturing based to service oriented; current heightened competition among graduates for employment; career service providers keeping pace with technological advances; and reunification with the Mainland and the opening up of the Chinese economy. Some key issues for the future include how to upgrade the educational level of the workforce; the promotion of tourism; and the government's plan to invest in the infrastructure. The government as well as secondary and tertiary education institutions are currently acting to address these issues. (JDM)

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The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

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10. THE HONG KONG SPECIAL ADMINISTRATIVE REGION

Louisa Li, Careers Education and Placement Centre

Context

Governmental Structure

Hong Kong was reunited with China and became part of one nation on July 1, 1997. With the resumption of sovereignty over Hong Kong, China has implemented the principle of one country, two systems and fulfilled the promises of a high degree of autonomy — Hong Kong people administering Hong Kong. Under the Basic Law, which is Hong Kong's constitutional document, Hong Kong's social, economic and political systems continue to remain distinct from those of Mainland China. It preserves Hong Kong's usual way of life. In a nutshell, free enterprise and free trade, prudent financial management and low taxation, the rule of law, an executive-led government and efficient civil service, which are among the most important factors of Hong Kong's success, have been guaranteed in the Basic Law.

The chief executive was elected by a selection committee by secret ballot. Mr Tung Chee Hwa was elected with a majority of votes, appointed by the PRC Central Government, and assumed office on July 1, 1997.

In accordance with the Basic Law, the chief executive has selected a group of 14 people to form the Executive Council, which he must consult before making important policy decisions and introducing bills to the Legislative Council.

The Legislative Council is responsible for a wide range of tasks which include enactment of laws, examination and approval of budgets, taxation and public expenditure proposed by the government and appointment of the judges of the Court of Final Appeal.

There are two municipal organizations —the Urban Council and the Regional Council — providing health, cultural and recreational services. At the district level, the district boards are responsible for advising the government on matters affecting the interests and well-being of the people living in the districts.

Education and Training System

The Hong Kong government accords high priority to maintaining and upgrading the quality of education at all levels. In recent years, over 20 percent of the government's total expenditure has been on education; tertiary education accounts for about one third of the education budget.

Two major ordinances regulate the provision of education in Hong Kong: the Education Ordinance and the Vocational Training Council Ordinance. The former regulates items such as the registration of teachers and managers, health and safety requirements, fees and charges, and teacher qualifications. The latter covers technical colleges, technical institutes, training centres and skills centres for the disabled.

The secretary for education and manpower is the person responsible for formulating education policy, securing funds in the government budget, and overseeing the effective implementation of educational programs, while the director of education implements educational policies at kindergarten, primary and secondary levels.

Members of the community also play an important part in the planning, development and management of the education system through various executive and advisory bodies, the more prominent ones being the Education Commission, the Board of Education and the University Grants Committee.

The Education Commission advises the government on the development of education as a whole in the light of community needs. Its terms of reference include, inter alia, defining educational objectives, formulating education policy and recommending priorities for implementation. The Board of Education is a statutory body appointed to advise the government on matters relating to school administration and finance, guidance, discipline, home–school co-operation and support services. The University Grants Committee (UGC) is appointed by the chief executive to advise on the development and funding of higher education and administer public grants to eight publicly funded institutions. It also plays a major role in monitoring quality assurance in the tertiary institutions.

The Vocational Training Council (VTC) advises the government on measures to ensure a comprehensive system of technical education and industrial training. It also administers, inter alia, technical colleges, technical institutes and industrial training centres, assesses manpower needs and recommends measures to meet such needs.

Key Points at which Individuals Have to Make Decisions within the Education and Training System

Hong Kong provides nine years of free compulsory education and schooling in government and aided primary schools. Admission to Primary 1 in government and aided schools is processed through a central system designed to eliminate competition for entry to popular schools. At the end of Primary 6, all pupils participating in the Secondary School Places Allocation System are allocated free Secondary 1 places. The allocation is based on parental choices, internal school assessments and a centrally

administered academic aptitude test. Secondary 3 leavers are selected for subsidized places in Secondary 4 or basic craft courses, according to internal school assessments and parental preference. Admission to Secondary 6 depends on results in the Hong Kong (HK) Certificate of Education Examination. Admission to universities depends on results in the HK Advanced Level Examination.

Current Provision

Careers guidance and employment services for secondary school students and the public at large are provided by the Education Department, the Labour Department and the Hong Kong Association of Careers Masters and Guidance Masters. These organizations work together to provide career information, guidance and employment assistance to their clients.

The Education Department
The Careers and Guidance Service Section of the Education Department promotes the development of careers services in secondary schools with a view to equipping young people with career decision-making skills and appropriate work attitudes. Its activities include:

- encouraging the establishment of a careers team in every secondary school to promote careers services;
- monitoring and supporting careers services in secondary schools;
- providing advice on careers guidance techniques and up-to-date information for careers teachers;
- organizing a training program for careers teachers jointly with the Labour Department; and
- providing resources and information services (including local and overseas study libraries) in the Further Studies Resources Centre.

The Further Studies Resources Centre serves students, parents and the general public. Careers guidance literature, journals and audio-visual materials are also available for careers teachers' reference in the Guidance Teacher Resources Centre. The Centre also functions as a venue for careers teachers to exchange ideas and conduct small group meetings.

The Labour Department
The Careers Advisory Service of the Labour Department organizes a variety of activities aimed at providing the latest career information to help young people make an informed decision on career choice according to their talents, interests and abilities. The unit also provides support services to careers teachers in discharging their careers guidance duties. To achieve its objectives, the unit provides the following services:

- maintaining the supply of up-to-date careers and educational resource materials;
- operating careers information centres for the public;

- organizing careers guidance a ctivities including careers exhibitions, careers quizzes, outreach career days and visits to work places and careers information centres; and
- providing training for careers teachers jointly with the Education Department.

Secondary schools and individuals having computers equipped with modems may also obtain up-to-date careers information through the Service's Bulletin Information System, Careers Info Express. Access to the system is free.

The Labour Department also operates the Careers Information Centres. Each Centre is equipped with a reference library, audio-visual materials and an inquiry service. Student group visits with free coaching services are arranged to encourage more participation from the young people. All services are provided free.

The Employment Services Division of the Labour Department provides free recruitment assistance to employers and placement services to job seekers. Through the Job Matching Programme, the division provides intensive job matching and counselling services to unemployed job seekers. The division also operates the Outreach Placement Service, which offers immediate employment assistance to workers affected by downsizing.

The Employees Retraining Board

The Employees Retraining Board provides retraining for local employees to cope with structural changes in the economy. Since January 1997, the program has been extended to include new immigrants. The board has representation from government, employers, employees, training institutions and manpower planning practitioners.

Training is delivered through a network of approved training bodies, with funding support for approved courses from the Employees Retraining Fund. The government injected HK$300 million when the fund was set up. Its regular income comes from a levy charged on employers employing imported workers under the labour importation schemes.

The Employees Retraining Scheme offers a wide variety of day and evening courses mainly for employees aged 30 and over. These courses cover training on job search skills, job-specific skills, general skills and specialized programs for the disabled and elderly. Employers, as end users, are encouraged to participate as much as possible in the design and delivery of the programs. While all full-time courses are free of charge, retrainees attending full-time courses lasting for more than one week are eligible to receive a retraining allowance.

The Hong Kong Association of Careers Masters and Guidance Masters
The general objective of the Association is to help schools in their delivery of careers and general guidance services to their students. The Association ensures that members are kept up-to-date with information on educational and careers opportunities both locally and abroad. It works hand in hand with the Careers and Guidance Services Section of the Education Department and the Labour Department in providing resource materials and advice. The Association also organizes visits to welfare agencies, business organizations and educational institutions to provide exposure for teachers to better equip them to assist students.

The Association provides professional development for teachers through organizing conferences, workshops and seminars.

Careers Services at Tertiary Institutions
All publically funded tertiary institutions, (eight) operate careers services for their students. The HKU Careers Education and Placement Centre (CEPC) is given as an example of the careers services the students in Hong Kong's tertiary institutions generally receive.

The CEPC provides services in career education and in placement. On the careers education side, the Centre aims to provide students with current and authoritative information and with guidance on careers to enable them to make informed career choices. The Centre offers various programs to help students acquire self-understanding, learn about the world of work and gain working experience that will help in career decision making. The Careers Library run by the Centre also provides students with reference materials to facilitate their efforts in independent learning, career planning and job search. On the placement side, the Centre organizes recruitment activities to assist students in finding permanent employment on graduation, and temporary jobs and training opportunities during summer vacations.

The careers education program provides workshops and lectures on career planning, transferable skills training, résumé writing, interview skills, assessment methods, creative job search and workplace skills. Other services include independent learning materials, one-to-one consultation, e-mail counselling, an alumni contact network and common careers questions leaflets.

The CEPC also provides a wide range of services to employers.

Helping to develop recruitment strategies

- Provide key information on graduate supply, course information, student profiles, employment trends and salary levels.

Raising recruiting companies' image on campus

- Display company information and inviting companies to hold joint functions with the CEPC.

Attracting applications

- Provide free advertising of full-time, part-time and summer job vacancies on campus as well as through the computer network NETjob.
- Distribute recruitment materials on the main campus and in residential halls.
- E-mail recruitment materials to students.

Meeting prospective employees

- Provide free facilities for recruitment presentations and exhibitions.

NETmatch: browsing CVs of HKU students/graduates

- Employers may select suitable candidates to fill their full-time, part-time and summer job vacancies through the Web site NETmatch where HKU students/graduates enter their CVs.

On-campus selection exercises

- Make test and interviewing rooms available free of charge.

Announcement of short lists

- Announce interview and other short lists through the CEPC.

Targeted mailing

- Produce special mailings to candidates with very specific skills or qualities.

The Centre regularly conducts follow-up surveys on graduate employment, obtains feedback from employers and undertakes studies on employment-related issues.

The Centre works in collaboration with the careers services of other local tertiary institutions to publish career information, conduct studies on graduate careers and develop new computer systems for placement work.

Apart from performing the above functions, the Centre also serves as a link between "town and gown." The Careers Advisory Board provides a forum for employers in the commercial, industrial and public sectors to exchange views with academics.

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Current Policy Issues

In the face of rapid change and development in Hong Kong in recent years, the following issues will undoubtedly influence the formulation of strategies and policies in the development of career services:

- In the last two to three decades, Hong Kong's economy has undergone a structural change. Previously, Hong Kong relied heavily on its manufacturing industries such as the garment, plastics and electronics segments for its livelihood. With the development of China's open-door policy in the last two decades and the reunification with the Mainland in 1997, an increasing number of factories have moved northward mainly because of lower land and labour costs. The 1991 Population Census and 1996 Population By-census show that the work force in manufacturing industries dwindled from 768,000 in 1991 to 573,000 in 1996. During the same period, the number of people employed in the service industry, including wholesale, retail, import/export trades, restaurants and hotels increased from 611,000 to 756,000. A similar trend occurred in finance, insurance, real estate and business services, with the number of employees increasing from 287,000 to 408,000. These figures clearly indicate that Hong Kong's economy has changed from being manufacturing based to becoming service oriented.

- The rapid expansion of tertiary education has heightened the competition for employment among graduates. Apart from looking at the graduates' academic qualifications, employers will increasingly focus on generic competencies, such as the ability to think laterally and analytically, to argue and present a case systematically and convincingly, to work in co-operation with colleagues and peers, and to apply their knowledge and experience to practical work situations. The role of those engaged in careers work will need to change and develop accordingly from that of a guidance worker to a trainer to meet employers' expectations.

- The language proficiency (both Chinese and English) of Hong Kong's youngsters has dropped fairly significantly. This phenomenon will inevitably affect their immediate employment opportunities as well as future career prospects, apart from its long-term effect on the territory's economy as a whole.

- Another issue, which will have an important bearing on the policy and direction of career services, is the rapid development of communication and information technology. Hong Kong is facing strong competition from its neighbouring economies including Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Singapore. In many areas such as trade, finance, transportation, communication and tourism, Hong Kong has to step up its efforts in

order to keep pace with these economies. Career services must be relevant for a knowledge-based economy. Career service providers need to work in collaboration with teachers to produce graduates who are able to make the best use of information technology, equipped with a spirit of exploration and discovery, and keen to improve themselves through continuous lifelong learning.

- The reunification with the Mainland, coupled with the opening up of the Chinese economy, has provided new and ample opportunities for our young generation. With its abundant supply of land and human resources, Mainland China serves as a vast hinterland for Hong Kong's trade and industries. Helping our young people understand the culture, history, political, economic and social systems of Mainland China will be one of the major tasks of the career services.

Key Issues for the Future

In his policy address delivered in October 1998, the Chief Executive, Mr Tung Chee Hua outlined Hong Kong's developments in the coming decade and beyond. His vision will have significant impact on the employment opportunities and career development of Hong Kong's citizens. The key issues delineated in this blueprint for Hong Kong's future follow:

- Strengthening the business links and economic co-operation between Hong Kong and the Mainland in one of the key initiatives. Certain areas are identified for special attention, which include finance, trade, transport, communication, energy, innovative technology, raw materials, tourism and agricultural development. Joint ventures between Hong Kong and Mainland enterprises will be promoted to a greater degree. An important role for Hong Kong will be to act as a bridge between China and the international community, mainly through international trade. The message for people involved in education and careers guidance is very clear: our young generation must be fully trained and equipped with the relevant knowledge and skills to undertake these tasks.

- Another key initiative is the importance placed on the development of high technology and multimedia. Hong Kong will be the innovation and technology centre for South China, particularly in the following areas:
  - application of information technology, especially in electronic commerce and software engineering;
  - design and fashion;
  - multimedia-based information and entertainment services;
  - Chinese medicine;
  - supplying professional and technological talents and services; and

- technology transfer between the Mainland and the rest of the world.

- How to upgrade the educational level, the technological knowledge and skills of the work force will inevitably be an important policy issue for the territory.

- Hong Kong is determined to maintain its position as the international financial centre of Asia. Hong Kong will retain its free and open financial structure and, at the same time, provide the necessary regulatory framework to attract foreign investors so it remains the key source of foreign capital for China.

- Tourism, one of Hong Kong's traditional economic strongholds, is another area for priority attention. Strategic reviews will be undertaken with a view to promoting new and sophisticated attractions to maintain the interests of visitors from the Mainland and from the rest of the world. The vision is to cultivate Hong Kong's image as the Asian centre of arts, culture, entertainment and sport.

- Hong Kong's small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) employ about two thirds of the work force. Their growth and development are essential for Hong Kong's economic health. The government has pledged to support the SMEs in a variety of ways such as helping them to obtain working capital, market information, finding good quality staff and controlling costs. Employment surveys of Hong Kong's tertiary education institutions reveal that an increasing number of graduates find employment and develop their careers with SMEs.

- The government's plan to invest in infrastructure will create a vast number of jobs at different levels, particularly for those with studies and skills in engineering, surveying and building. Apart from the new international airport, in operation since July 1998, other major projects include a comprehensive transport system of roads, rail networks and a mass transit railway which will cost HK$110 billion or US$14,200 million and will create 27,000 jobs during their design and construction phase.

Action Steps

To bring the vision into reality and to address the issues identified above, the government, the secondary and tertiary education institutions, and other bodies have made tremendous efforts. The following is a summary of the more salient actions:

- The Council of International Advisers, comprising 14 international business leaders, was set up to advise the government on business strategies.

- The Commission on Innovation and Technology was established, chaired by an internationally renowned scholar Professor Tien Chang Lin to advise the government on the development and application of technology.

- To address the problem of language education, the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR) was appointed to set goals for language learning at different levels of education, to propose specific language attainment targets at each stage of education and to identify research and development projects for the enhancement of language proficiency.

- Providing quality education is one of the major objectives of the government. Well-trained teachers are required to achieve this goal. To ensure that the teacher education programs are of high quality and relevant for the community, the government has set up the Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Qualifications (ACTEQ).

- At the tertiary education level, many programs, either academic or extra-curricular in nature, have been organized to meet the demands and challenges of the new situation. The Curriculum Reform, General Education Programme, HKU Worldwide Programme, Student Exchange, Internship, Mentorship, Careers Education, Transferable Skills, Intensified Learning Opportunity Programme, Leadership and Life Skills, and Personal Growth are examples of major activities introduced in recent years to broaden student knowledge and to provide opportunities to acquire work experience in Mainland China and other parts of the world.

It is believed that under the leadership of the Special Administrative Region government and with the joint efforts of the various sectors of the community, effective actions will continue to be taken to tackle the issues. Hong Kong will emerge from the Asian financial crisis with new vigour for the challenges ahead and to provide even brighter career opportunities and prospects for its citizens.